

ART SPIEL

Reflections on the work of contemporary artists

RYAN SARAH MURPHY - ARRIVING AT AN UNKNOWN ENDPOINT

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Ryan Sarah Murphy at her studio

Ryan Sarah Murphy's engaging multiple series of collages, photographs and videos are driven by material and process. Her process resembles a graceful and skillful dance – the steps are predetermined but the movement flow is intuitive and imaginative, or as she says, it altogether represents a collaboration between herself and the material.

Ryan Sarah Murphy shares with Art Spiel what brought her to art, some insight about her ideas, process, and current projects.



Ryan Sarah Murphy, *Strike*, 2015, found (unpainted) cardboard, foamcore, 26 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 25 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 3 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches
Photo courtesy of Jeanette May Studio

AS: Tell me a bit about what brought you to art.

Ryan Sarah Murphy: I've always gravitated towards art-making as it seemed to be the most effective way to ever communicate anything to the outside world. I've never been much of a talker, so making images has been a fairly reliable bridge connecting me to some greater whole. Growing up I didn't have a ton of exposure to arts & culture. I went to catholic school the whole way through so there was little-to-no emphasis on art & music whatsoever. But my grandmother was quite crafty and a bit of an eccentric with the things she collected (some would say hoarded), so I think whatever early creative interests I had really started with her. She had a room in her house filled with dollhouses that her brother (my Uncle Bud) had custom-built and furnished. I spent a lot of time playing and "living" in those little rooms, it was great. Though subconsciously I always knew I was an artist, I guess it wasn't until moving to New York and getting through art school that things solidified a bit and this weird path of art-making became the way forward.

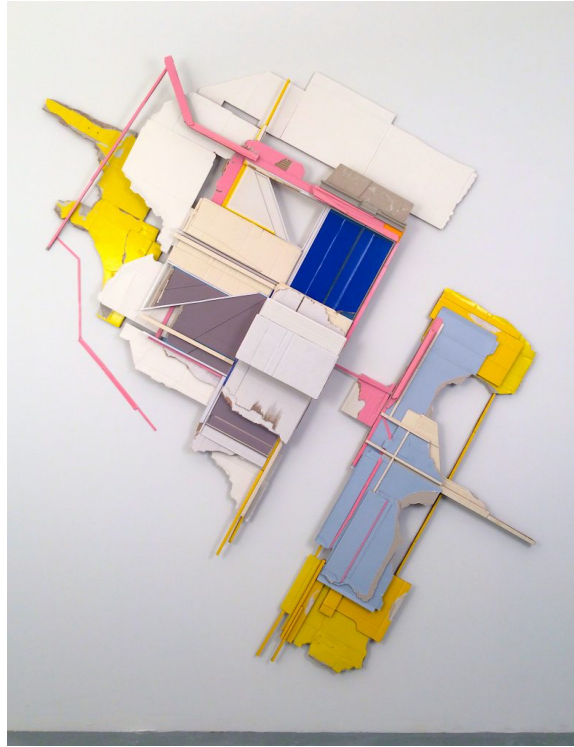


Ryan Sarah Murphy, *Inside Voices*, 2018, Collage, acrylic, stain, pencil on paper, 14.75 x 11 inches, photo courtesy of the artist

AS: On your website you categorize your work mainly by material – “Cardboard”, “book covers” “Paper.” Is the material driving your process? What can you share about your process in general?

Ryan Sarah Murphy: Absolutely, materials have always been my point of entry when it comes to creating something. I trust that the material contains within it whatever it is I’m meant to communicate or express. I spend a lot of time looking at and handling my chosen materials in a sort of removed, abstract way until all I’m really taking in is shape and color. My process is mostly an exercise in getting out of the way as much as possible and letting the material take over. In order to do this I tend to work within certain guidelines or limitations, such as never hand-painting the cardboard and hence limiting the potential color palette to only the found colored cardboard that I have on hand. If I were to paint the cardboard, the possibilities would be endless and I would have to impose my own preconceived idea of what the piece should look like in the end, instead of letting the material dictate its own form. I look at it as a collaboration between myself and the material. I define the general parameters of the process, and the material then determines how the form develops – together we reach a resolution (most of the time).

It’s most interesting when there’s absolutely no plan and the end result is some new and unexpected form on the wall staring back at me. There’s no great surprise when trying to plan ahead.

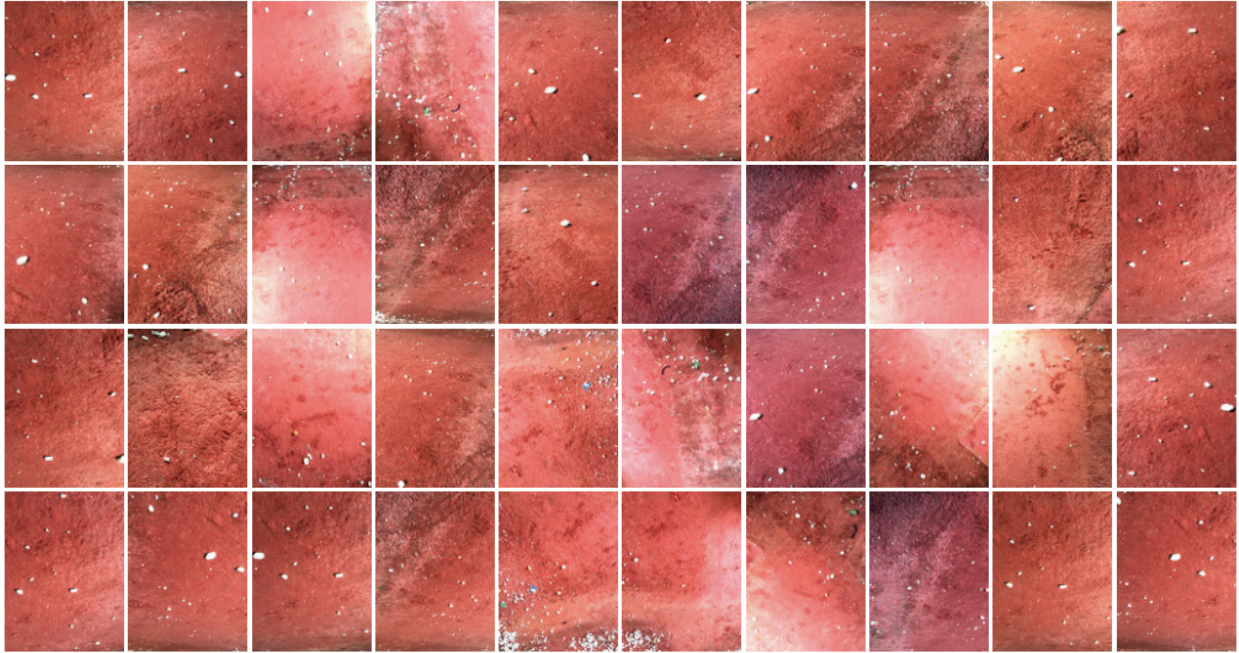


Ryan Sarah Murphy, *Temporary Holdings II*, 2018, found (unpainted) cardboard, cut book covers, foamcore, wall installation: 84L x 73W x 4.25D inches, photo courtesy of the artist

AS: Let's take a closer look at your Cardboard series. How do you start and do you work in series?

Ryan Sarah Murphy: I've found that the starting point for this series almost always lies in a single piece or "line" of colored cardboard. The first step involves cutting or tearing away any text, branding or perceived imperfection in the cardboard packaging so that I am left with just the fragments of solid color. There's some notion of a horizon line in each piece and everything gets built out from there, one line to the next. Because I don't paint the cardboard, I'm limited to only the colored material that I have on hand. The form ebbs and flows depending on the color fragments I've collected. The resolution of a composition is all there in the material already, I just have to be in sync with the form and process as it grows on the wall and intuit which colors want to coalesce. The form eventually finds itself within a certain, balanced framework.

I usually work on a few pieces at once. Sometimes a piece just has to hang on the wall for awhile and all I can do is stare at it without necessarily thinking about it. A certain angle or color combination in one composition often aids in furthering along the construction of another piece. Because so much of the work shares the same material fragments, there is a natural connection that ties the work together. My tendency is to group and organize things in some way that appeases my inner control freak, so I generally work in a serialized fashion and categorize or inventory different aspects of my practice according to material or specific process.



Ryan Sarah Murphy, *Tracts – Far Enough Away*, 2017, digital photographs, 10 x 8 inches each, 40-part installation, photo courtesy of the artist

AS: I see that you also have photography work. What can you share about “Tracts” for example?

Ryan Sarah Murphy: The “Tracts” series relate to landscape and perceptions of interior and exterior spatial experiences.

“Tracts – Far Enough Away” consists of 40 photographs installed in a grid. Each image is a close up shot of an old carpet that is stained and matted down in places and littered with bits of debris. I found this carpet really interesting to look at, it’s wear and tear so raw and apparent. The rug’s ragged pile, pressed down and indented by heavy furniture, contained the visual remnants of foot traffic and a lifetime’s worth of comings & goings throughout this particular room. So the initial impulse was just to collect some images of this carpet. The ‘making’ of Tracts came later when I began to think of all of the collected photos as one piece. I first began to install the images on the wall in an attempt to replicate the look of the rectangular, floor-to-floor carpeting of the room. But as I began to move the images around the grid in search of a composition that made the most visual sense, a nebulous, cosmic imagery began to emerge. The specks of white Styrofoam scattered across the carpet began to look like stars at a distance. This strange shift in perspective was really surprising, revealing an unexpected duality.

“Tracts – Later Forever” uses the same starting point (detailed photos of a floor rug – a beat up ratty yellow color), as well as the assembly and configuration of the given images. I digitally inverted the color of these photos, turning it into an otherworldly, tundra-like landscape.

AS: How do you see the relationship between your photography and collage/ assemblage/ relief work?

Ryan Sarah Murphy: I have found that the photography work relates directly to my other chosen mediums in that it shares this impulse to arrive at an unknown endpoint through the acquisition and/or construction of images that have been captured and collected with no initial intention. There's an answer or a pathway within each individual photograph that gets revealed only when it's assembled into part of a larger series or group. The underlying compulsions toward structure, ground, and contained space are themes throughout my work that lie squarely within the abstracted landscape. And the process of collage – from the traditional sense of gluing materials together to the act of selectively mounting a series of photographs on the wall – this has always been my preferred mode of working (adding/subtracting, covering/revealing, piecing things together and tearing them apart.)

AS: You also have video. What can you tell me about that facet of your work?

Ryan Sarah Murphy: I started making videos a couple years ago. I became interested in taking static images of drawings and other works in my studio and seeing what would happen if I got them moving. I also became interested in taking videos of everyday moments out in nature and seeing what could happen by altering the color and tweaking the composition, like enforcing a kind of set geometry or hard-edged line drawing over a natural, organic scene. I've found that my computer screen is akin to my studio wall in terms of being a ground to work upon and build a piece. Most of the videos begin as a single mp4 file, then through a process of duplicating, reversing, rotating and re-recording the file (essentially collaging the video in various ways across the screen) I'm left with a new composition moving in all sorts of new ways. Playing around with the color and contrast further removes the piece from its original source material, turning it more into an animation or an oddly abstracted moveable drawing.

AS: What are you doing in your studio these days?

Ryan Sarah Murphy: I'm working on a new series of works on paper along with a couple new low relief pieces. I cut apart a big cardboard & book cover wall installation that I made last year (Temporary Holdings II) and will turn the many torn up sections into new pieces. These sections are lying around my studio off the wall, so they feel very architectural model-like. It's been kind of interesting seeing these sculptural chunks from a different perspective. We'll see what happens with them. Aside from that I'm getting ready for a couple group shows coming up in February- I'll have a video piece in a show called "Soft Grit" at LoBo Gallery in Brooklyn, and I'll be showing a series of 6 collage drawings in "Pulp + Process" at the Society of Arts and Crafts in Boston.

<http://artspiel.org/ryan-sarah-murphy-arriving-at-an-unknown-endpoint/#more-2889>